We claim:

1	i.	A method for use by a service provider to facilitate communication between
2	custome	ers of the service provider, the method comprising the steps of:
3		receiving a request from a customer to establish communication with another
4	custome	er;
5		confirming the identity of each customer;
6		transmitting to each customer executable code enabling encrypted
7	commun	nication therewith;
8		obtaining from each customer information regarding the customer's computing
9	environi	ment;
10		preparing a set of applications for use by each customer, in accordance with
11	said info	ormation and said request;
12		transmitting the set of applications as executable code to each customer;
13		establishing a communication path to each customer; and
14		specifying the communication path to the customers, thereby permitting the
15	custome	ers to communicate over said path using said applications.
1	2.	The method of claim 1 wherein said confirming, transmitting and obtaining
2	steps are	e performed via the Internet, and said establishing step comprises
3		obtaining connectivity services via the Internet for use by the customers; and
4		altering the communication path in accordance with customer requirements.
1	3.	The method of claim 2 wherein the connectivity services are obtained by
2	contactii	ng a vendor of said services via the Internet.

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1	4.	The method of claim 1 wherein the communication path is established for a	
2	limite	ed time period.	
1	5.	The method of claim 1 wherein said preparing step comprises obtaining at	
2	least o	least one of the applications via the Internet.	
1	6.	The method of claim 1 wherein said method is performed using an edge-	
2	of-net	of-network server.	
1	7.	The method of claim 6 wherein said preparing step comprises obtaining at	
2	least o	one of the applications from a storage device connected to the server.	
1	8.	The method of claim 2 wherein the specified communication path is	
2	establ	established on the Internet and communications using the path are encrypted, so that the	
3	custor	mers participate in a secure virtual trading zone.	
1	9.	The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of monitoring the	
2	comm	communication path.	

applet resident at the customer.

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The method of claim 1 wherein said obtaining step is performed using an

1	11. A system for facilitating communication between customers of a service
2	provider, the system comprising:
3	a server connected to the Internet,
4	the server being enabled to perform a method including the steps of
5	receiving a request from a customer to establish communication with another
6	customer,
7	confirming the identity of each customer,
8	transmitting to each customer executable code enabling encrypted
9	communication therewith,
10	obtaining from each customer information regarding the customer's computing
11	environment,
12	preparing a set of said applications for use by each customer, in accordance with
13	said information and said request,
14	transmitting the set of applications as executable code to each customer,
15	establishing a communication path to each customer, and
16	specifying the communication path to the customers, thereby permitting the
17	customers to communicate over said path using said applications.
1	12. The system of claim 11, further comprising a dedicated communication
2	link to a provider of connectivity services.
1	13. The system of claim 11 wherein said server performs the confirming,
	transmitting
2	and obtaining steps via the Internet, and the establishing step comprises
3	obtaining connectivity services via the Internet for use by the customers; and
4	altering the communication path in accordance with customer requirements.

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1	14.	The system of claim 13 wherein the server obtains the connectivity services
2	by cor	ntacting a vendor of said services via the Internet.
1	15.	The system of claim 11 wherein the communication path is established for a
2	limited	I time period.
1	16.	The system of claim 11 wherein in the preparing step the server obtains at
2	least one of the applications via the Internet.	
1	17.	The system of claim 11 wherein said server is an edge-of-network server.
1	18.	The system of claim 11, further comprising a storage device connected to the
2	server,	and in the preparing step the server obtains at least one of the applications from
3	said storage device.	
1	19.	The system of claim 11 wherein the server is enabled to establish the specified
2	commu	unication path on the Internet with communications using the path being
3	encryp	ted, so that the customers participate in a secure virtual trading zone.
1	20.	The system of claim 11 wherein the server is enabled to monitor the
2	commu	unication path.

using an applet resident at the customer.

21.

The system of claim 11 wherein the server obtains the customer information

1	22.	A computer program product comprising instructions for performing a method
2	to facil	litate communication between customers of a service provider, the method
3	compr	ising the steps of:
4		receiving a request from a customer to establish communication with another
5	custon	ner;
6		confirming the identity of each customer;
7		transmitting to each customer executable code enabling encrypted
8	comm	unication therewith;
9		obtaining from each customer information regarding the customer's computing
10	enviro	nment;
11		preparing a set of applications for use by each customer, in accordance with
12	said information and said request;	
13		transmitting the set of applications as executable code to each customer;
14		establishing a communication path to each customer; and
15		specifying the communication path to the customers, thereby permitting the
16	custom	ners to communicate over said path using said applications.
1	23.	The computer program product of claim 22 wherein said confirming, transmitting
2	and ob	taining steps are performed via the Internet, and said establishing step comprises
4		obtaining connectivity services via the Internet for use by the customers; and
5		altering the communication path in accordance with customer requirements.
1	24.	The computer program product of claim 23 wherein the connectivity services are
2	obtaine	ed by contacting a vendor of said services via the Internet.
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1	25. The computer program product of claim 22 wherein the communication path is	
2	established for a limited time period.	
1	26. The computer program product of claim 22 wherein said preparing step	
2	comprises obtaining at least one of the applications via the Internet.	
1	27. The computer program product of claim 22 wherein said method is performed	
2	using an edge-of-network server.	
1	28. The computer program product of claim 27 wherein said preparing step	
2	comprises obtaining at least one of the applications from a storage device connected to	
3	the server.	
1	29. The computer program product of claim 23 wherein the specified communication	
2	path is established on the Internet and communications using the path are encrypted, so	
3	that the customers participate in a secure virtual trading zone.	
1	30. The computer program product of claim 22 wherein the method further	
2	comprises the step of monitoring the communication path.	

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performed using an applet resident at the customer.

The computer program product of claim 22 wherein said obtaining step is